

Judith Nickel presented with posthumous Silver Star for Brother SPC4 Barry Burnite, US Army for heroism in Vietnam

Also, over 70 Service Providers on hand to assist Veterans

March 8, 2010 - **FOLSOM, PA**—Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) hosted his fourth Pennsylvania 7th Congressional District Veterans Summit since taking office in January, 2007. At the event, Judith Nickel of Brookhaven was presented with a Silver Star that was awarded posthumously to her brother, SPC4 Barry Burnite, US Army. SPC4 Burnite was a 1961 graduate of Springfield High School, joined the Army in 1964 and was killed in action in the Ia Drang Valley in South Vietnam in 1965.

The text of the Citation accompanying the Silver Star follows:

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, has awarded the SILVER STAR to:
(THEN) SPECIALIST FOUR BARRY T. BURNITE
UNITED STATES ARMY

For gallantry in action against the enemy on 17 November 1965, in Ia Drang Valley, Republic of South Vietnam, while serving as a Machine Gunner in 2d Platoon, Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). During the Battle of Landing Zone Albany, Specialist Burnite was wounded early in the attack but continued to fight. Throughout the battle, he remained in the fight to redistribute ammunition, provide first aid to his wounded comrades, and rally his squad to attack the North Vietnamese forces. Specialist Burnite returned fire while continuously exposing himself to intense enemy fire. He defied enemy attacks directed at him to employ his machine gun with deadly results allowing other Soldiers to seek cover and continue to fight. As forces advanced, Specialist Burnite joined a group of three other Soldiers and subsequently flanked advancing enemy soldiers to clear an area in front of his platoon and reduce attacks on the command post. As enemy forces concentrated on his position, outnumbering his comrades, Specialist Burnite stayed behind to cover his unit's withdrawal and was mortally wounded. The gallantry displayed by Specialist Four Burnite was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, the 7th Cavalry, and the United States Army.

Over 70 service providers (listed below) were on hand connecting local Veterans, Active Duty Military Members, and their families with representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs; Veterans Service Organizations; companies interested in hiring or doing business with Veterans; local Colleges and Universities to help Veterans utilize their 21st Century GI Bill benefits; and other organizations that provide services to the Veterans community. After meeting with the providers, Congressman Sestak, who served 31 years in the U.S. Navy, offered his gratitude to his fellow Veterans and their loved ones.

Here is the text of the Congressman's prepared remarks:

It is a special honor to be before you this evening. As you know these Summits are the most personal and important events on my calendar. We started at Delaware County Community

College in 2007 and since then we have found a home here at Ridley High School. Each year the size of this event has grown significantly and I want to thank the Principal, staff, and faculty of Ridley High School for making us so welcome. Tonight, six Raider Ambassadors are helping out, as is the Marine Corps JROTC program from Sun Valley High School, led by Colonel Tom Reimann, U.S. Marine Corps. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the members of the 3rd Infantry Division Color Guard who traveled from Washington, D.C. for this event.

We are departing from the itinerary of past Veterans Summits for two reasons. First and foremost, it is an opportunity to honor a fallen hero of the Vietnam War, Specialist Four Barry Burnite, U.S. Army. Barry graduated from Springfield High School in 1961, worked for PECO, and in 1964 he joined the U.S. Army and was deployed to South Vietnam to serve with the 2d Platoon, Company A, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

In a battle made famous by the Joe Galloway book *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*, the gallantry of (then) Colonel Hal Moore and his Soldiers made our nation once again aware of just how tough the war in Vietnam was to fight, and how much the men and women who served there sacrificed for us. That battle was one of many in a war that was brutally hard on our young men and women while they served, and even harder when they returned.

During World War II, when our servicemen and women went overseas, the watchwords at home were support and sacrifice until they returned. Rationing, war bonds, scrap drives, and prayer vigils were the order of the day throughout the U.S.A. Somewhere we lost that sense of purpose as a nation and while the Vietnam War was being fought, the home front was marked either by confrontation or indifference -- except for the families directly involved. As a result, the return of these young warriors was a national disgrace. Every war has its signature wounds. Those of Vietnam were dramatically different from World War II and Korea. Yet we failed to adjust at the VA to treat the unique casualties of that conflict. We failed to offer these Vets the best possible education and we failed to manage our economy to provide them jobs and careers to get their lives back on track. Not only did they have to survive the war, they had to weather two very serious recessions in 1969 and 1974. And, if they found themselves incarcerated, the VA denied them medical care even though their incarceration may have been the direct result of a traumatic brain injury or PTSD incurred as a result of their service.

Government then continued to fail them for over thirty years. Throughout that period there was insufficient effort to enroll Vietnam Vets in the VA system. Just last year, at this event, a Vietnam Vet who had previously lost faith in the VA following his service in Vietnam finally enrolled in the VA medical system. Unfortunately, he is now in the very serious stages of an illness that might have been detected and cured with earlier care. Let me be clear -- the people in the VA are wonderful, hardworking people. But from the 1970(s) until 2007 they did not have the resources to address the post-Vietnam War problems with PTSD, homelessness, home loans, business loans, job training, or addiction to name a few.

Worst of all, as the nation was at war in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003, Congress outrageously permitted the Commander in Chief and VA to limit access to the VA medical system just as the Vietnam Vets and their brothers and sisters from World War II and Korea were reaching the age where their income and health were both in decline.

We addressed that exact issue in the 110th Congress and here at Ridley High School when Representative Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Veterans Committee, was present at our second Veterans Summit to hear first hand how Priority 7 and 8 Veterans were being denied medical care they earned by their service to our nation.

Since 2007, Congress has provided the largest budget increases in VA history and we are reversing the neglect that our early casualties from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom received when they returned from war. The outrageous conditions at Walter Reed Army Hospital brought back the worst memories of the Post-Vietnam War era and caused a national response of "Never again".

To see that our Veterans are never again subjected to sub-standard medical care, I am proud to report that I recently met with the VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Robert Petzel, to address how we can work together to see that the local VA Medical facilities will always meet the highest possible standards.

In the coming months an unprecedented partnership between my office and the Philadelphia VA Medical Center will begin. In that process we will review the results of inspections at that facility and ensure that only the best protocols, personnel, and equipment are in place. This partnership is the result of many visits to the Philadelphia VA Medical Center and many discussions with Philadelphia VA Medical Center Director Richard Citron, the Secretary of the VA General Eric Shinseki, VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich, and Under Secretary Petzel.

I disagree with those who accept the notion that government is not capable of big things. In my lifetime, government has demonstrated it can work near miracles if the right people, energy, and abilities are brought to bear.

The second reason for our change in format this evening is to be certain that everyone present has as much time as possible to spend with the service providers that are here for you. I am extremely proud that we have 73 separate organizations present.

But let me return to the primary purpose for this gathering. We are here because of the courage, honor, and comradeship of Barry Burnite. He gave his life for us and may we always honor his sacrifice by doing all that we can for our nation and one another.

The following organizations attended the event to assist Veterans and their families:

AETNA
AMVets
Anderson Elder Law
ARMing Heroes
Block Law Office
Boeing Company

Cabrini College
Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Center for Veterans Enterprise
Cheyney University
Child Guidance Resource Centers
Coatesville VA Medical Center
Collegiate Consortium
Community Action Agency of Delaware County
Consumer Credit Counseling Service of the Delaware Valley
Crozer Keystone Health System
Delaware County Department of Veterans Affairs
Delaware County Literacy Council
Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA)/PATCO
Delaware Valley College
Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Council
Department of Homeland Security/OSDBU
Disabled American Veterans
Drexel University
Fidelis Construction
Forean, Inc.
Freedom & Honor
Graduate! Philadelphia
Helmets to Hardhats
High Seas Mariners
Hillside Sanctuary
Holy Family University
Jewish War Veterans Post 305
Keller Williams Main Line
Magee Rehabilitation
Marine Corps League-Smedley Butler Detachment
Marine Corps League-Upper Darby Attachment
NAMI
National Alliance of Women Veterans
Neumann University
Office of State Representative Bryan Lentz
Operation Home & Healing Services
Outward Bound
PA CareerLink Delaware County
PACE Program
Penn State Brandywine
Pennsylvania American Legion
Pennsylvania Bar Association
Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Veterans/Military Education
Pennsylvania Institute of Technology
Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Philadelphia Health Law Project

Philadelphia VA Medical Center
Philadelphia VA Regional Office and Insurance Center
Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center
Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic
ReMed
Ride Away
Salvation Army of Chester
Senior Resource Guide
SEPTA
Small Business Administration
Social Security Administration
TRICARE Regional Office North
U.S. Department of the Treasury
United States Census Bureau
Veterans Affairs Educational Liaison for Pennsylvania
Veterans Group
VFW Post 928
Victory Media, INC
Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Post 67
Weichert Realtors
Widener University Small Business Development Center
Widener Veterans Law Clinic

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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